

1990

Spectrum, 1990

Spectrum Contributors
Northwestern College, Iowa

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Spectrum



Northwestern College



May 1990



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Winter

by Paul Beltman

The cold of Winter is the chill of
Death.

A chill that promises a fight,

A long, dirty fight.

In this struggle there can be only one winner.

Season follows season, and always the Winter returns.

There must always be Winter somewhere,

Whether by Nature or by Man.

Everyone

Must feel the despair of Winter, before they can really

Experience the Summer.

Age follows age, and season follows season.

I myself have seen some small Winter,

And the Summer is even more precious now.

But still I look to that final Winter that

Claims all of us wretched souls in the end . . .

And I wonder,

What could be the Summer that might arrive?

49 sq. ft.

by Julie Van Zee

Black strips box in
stitched memories--

New floral garden smocks,
ruffled pinafores for Easter.
Merry Christmas!
Navy and grey plaid
wrapped in cellophane and bows.

Black with orange stripes,
Dad, next to me--

a reminder to keep quiet
during church.

Blue patchwork,
holds Snoopy Band-Aids,
comfort for scraped knees.

Grandma in ripe green
and white checkers
like cafe tablecloths,
serving fresh cookies and
milk still warm from the cow.

A young boy runs
In school bus yellow
through crimson speckled alfalfa
with black dogs

--In one 7 by 7 foot square.

Journal of an Expedition

by Wade Zeilenga

On the weekend of February 17, a group of six men set out for the majestic peaks of Estes Park, Colorado to embark on an expedition on cross country skis which would result in the conquering of Bear Mountain. It is important to realize when asking the other survivors of the trip: Dave DeKoster, Kevin Sutton, Steve Beers, Dave Ditzemberger and Bill Swart, that they might mislead you and give you false information about what happened on the trip. They are not to be trusted; any derogatory comments about me should be ignored. They're just jealous. In an effort to dispel any rumors, I submit to you this account.

Feb 2, 6:30 p.m. The evening shadows growing long, the men are restless and ready for departure. After a short prayer and a small power struggle, we are ready to leave. Just as I feared, my companions are hesitant to call me captain and I find difficulty

in getting them to salute me. However, once they realize my leadership abilities and my possession of the van keys, they are quick to cooperate and we are on our way.

6:35 p.m. After stopping back to our point of departure to pick up one Mr. Steven Beers, we are off.

8:05 p.m. On the road for a little over an hour, the men are in high spirits. An interesting game of "Rook" starts up and the tunes on the radio are accompanied by six joyous voices.

Feb 3, 1:35 a.m. Somewhere in the monotonous state of Nebraska, we stop for gas. The men are showing signs of insubordination and disrespect, but I judge that this is the result of a long ride and the fact that I would not give anyone their shoes back until they said the official passwords. You

would think that a simple phrase such as "Wade is great" would be easy to remember.

1:40 a.m. We return to the gas station to pick up Steve.

4:48 a.m. I have just broken up a fight over a bag of trail mix. The company's morale seems to be at an all time low. The radio plays on without any accompaniment and a friendly card game has turned into a violent game of aggression.

7:59 a.m. We've arrived. We step out of the van and stand in awe of the natural beauty around us. Surrounded by mountains, we are lost in the grandeur of the immense peaks. White mountains reaching to the sky beckon us to them. Bill is so impressed that he turns to me and says, "Have you seen my hat?"

12:02 p.m. Having parked the van and gotten all our gear on our backs, we are on a trail steep enough to frighten even the most daring mountain goat. The group is skiing well under my direction, already DeKoster has distinguished himself as the clown of the group. His knack for falling at

the most inopportune times usually takes one or two of us with him in his cloud of powder.

3:05 p.m. We have stopped for a short break to regain our breath and see if we can locate DeKoster. The last time we saw him was at 6,000 feet and losing altitude very quickly. His last words were, "Oh, I don't know. It doesn't look that steep." None of us dared follow him, but he left signs for us so that we could find him, such as snapped off trees, blasted through snowdrifts, and long marks on a frozen pond made by what appeared to be his fingernails. We continue our search.

5:35 p.m. We have found Dave and are in a hurry to set up camp before dark. Dave seems happy that we found him, or so we guess since he isn't saying a whole lot. In fact, the last time he spoke to us was when we pulled him out of that snowdrift. He just sat there with a frozen expression of horror on his face, his mouth full of snow, and uttered, "hibmifgleacon." Dave's condition has frightened a few of my group, and tension is growing about tomorrow's trip. For tonight, there's nothing to do but get a good night sleep.

Feb 19 2:15 a.m. We have stopped for gas and are on our way home. I apologize for not writing in the journal for a period of time, but it wasn't until now that my hands have stopped shaking enough to write. I submit to you this account:

We awoke fresh and ready to go. We started our ascent and final attempt at Bear Mountain Peak with high hopes and even higher aspirations. The group climbed well under my direction for the first three hours, and after we stopped for lunch, climbed almost as well, with only a few minor falls. It was surprising that we reached the top as soon as we did, but as we were climbing, Steve turned to us and said, between heavy pants, "This is...(wheeze)... the top!" The fact that we had reached the top so soon surprised me--partly because it happened so quickly but even more so because the trail led higher up the mountain. I tried to bring this small matter up to Steve, but he insisted, "This is the top! (wheeze) We go NO FURTHER."

The only thing left to do was to return down the trail to find some professional help for Steve. The way down the mountain left a lasting impression on my mind, not to mention various other parts of my anatomy. We started the descent single file, but that only lasted the first twenty

feet, and before we knew it we were rolling down the hill much like an avalanche. From then on everything became fuzzy and it is hard for me to remember exactly what occurred. I remember at one time that Steve was on my back, I was on Dave's shoulders, and Dave was on Kevin's stomach, but that was before things really got crazy. Trees whipped past us like they were standing still, surprised deer in peaceful meadows looked up in shock and in horror as a large cloud of limbs, skis, and poles shot past them, and somewhere down in the campsite, campers looked up at the mountain for the source of the long, quavering, siren-like screech.

Steve and I managed to dismount Dave's shoulders, and then Steve was using Bill and me as poles. That was when things went black. I awoke as the others were packing the van and was surprised at the good job that they did without my supervision. We traveled on into the night until now. If things go right we should be home by 7 a.m. I must be sure to congratulate the men on their bravery and skill during the expedition. That is, as soon as they untie me.

2:25 a.m. We return to the gas station and pick up Steve.

Shadows

by KMG

Some of us are shadows--

You walk by us each day.

An aimless beggarly changeling

Who knows not how to play;

Wraith--like figures drift along

Companionless night or day;

Fleeting phantoms in the mist

Who just get in the way;

Faceless waifs on the streets--

You see not and turn away.

Some of us exist like shadows

Only when we block light's way.

Whole

by Grace Ann De Boer

I sometimes wonder if others have an edge that I don't, kind of like a sixth sense, or extra pinky; then I'd have an excuse. It's not that I'm so bad, but--

What am I doing--I can't stop now, there's too much to do; if I don't get going, the mess will never get cleaned up.

She jerked her cheek from her palm and stood. Before anyone could see her idling, she grabbed the Duty Chart and checked down the list.

A sweaty, green-clad and bloodied doctor pushed through the swing doors, scoped the hall, and walked up behind her. He gripped an opaque garbage bag stretched white in places by the lumpy mass inside. She felt a tap on her shoulder,

"Grace, here. Take care of this, will you?"

The bag held fluid-bloated tissue and bone. The doctor kept it swinging in front of him, as if he pinched a rat tail and was obliged to carry it to a rubbish bin. Automatically, Grace reached out to take the bag, in it, the remains of the last operation. She didn't watch this one; no big deal. The young doctor disentangled his fingers from the plastic's neck and put it on the floor, ignoring her outstretched arm. He left promptly, rubbing and wiping his hand on his pants.

"Funny, he can cut off parts but can't handle the mess," she thought.

Grace put down the check list, grasped the thing, and headed down the hall.

Every morning she worked in the operating rooms. She primarily was a hygienist but got stuck with OR duty as well. Grace was the one who sponged up stringy, loose flesh clinging to the paper robes and patients' chests. Grace was the

one who wiped dried blood around the bone stumps; those jobs felt nursish. But after they were finished her role switched to custodian. After the veins were sewn up, and the patient wheeled away, she was the one who mopped up the "Shoot and Slash Room," as the surgeons called it. Strewn on the floor and cast on the instruments was rotting, purple flesh and oozing pinkish cellulose. She ignored the nauseating metallic smell, bagged up the stuff, and threw it all in the freezer for the garbage man to pick up. That kind of waste was in the garbage bag she now carried.

The flesh meant nothing to her anymore, not even that it once was alive and human. No, Grace was a professional now, able even to counsel the amputees with a certain dispassionate air of predictability. Her patients felt confident in her care, or just too dazed to argue.

After the gore was sponged away, the room sparkled in pale green tile and polished chrome, and smelled of ammonia. It was so cold and clean that one would not imagine the violent slicing, sweating doctor and panicked patients that later messed the whole room up again.

Grace tossed the plastic in the big walk-in hospital meat locker—the freezer.

Her job was not over yet. She crossed the swinging doors of the OR and

hurried to her patient's room to comfort "anxious husband guarding his loved one.-- How sweet," she thought, cringing.

Room 314 was locked and no light gleamed under the door. Grace walked into the adjoining nurse's office. The office had a one-way mirror to inspect post-trauma patients. Inside the door a metal cart rested against the wall, a labeled plastic arm inside. She covered the plastic limb with a sheet. She looked into the glass and saw a man shaking his wife by the shoulder so she'd wake up. The woman tossed and groaned. Grace quickly stepped out of the mirror-room, unlocked 314, and entered. She quietly pulled the metal cart behind her, unseen by the man.

"Sir, don't panic, she's still under the anesthesia."

Grace glided silently to the I.V., then to the woman, and picked up her wrist to check the pulse. Grace didn't restrain the man from slapping his wife's cheek. However, after a few seconds he quieted himself and carefully laid his wife's head back down on the pillow and listened to the nurse.

"I'd let her sleep for now, BUT LATER, I'll need your help to pull her up out of bed, and walk off the drug. Many of our traumatic patients wake up screaming from bad dreams. Their subconscious reenacts

the scene through dreams. Your wife dreams of her car accident. That's all right. It gets those frightening feelings out of her system..."

By the time she finished explaining, Grace had discreetly taken out the plastic limb and hooked it on.

"In the dream, they feel the car crash and then the pain. She'll probably grab her arm. If it isn't there, she could hurt herself. Now, if your wife feels that her arm is still intact, she won't panic and lash out. It's much easier for her."

Grace walked around the bed to where the man sat, not calmly, and stood over him.

"Really, this new arm feels very natural. Look, it even has naturalistic plastic skin and tiny arm hairs."

Grace took his hand and put it on his wife's plastic limb. She patted his hand reassuringly.

"Soon you won't have to help her--she can do everything by herself."

I never liked sounding enthusiastic about a piece of plastic and wire.

Doubtless I'll have to do more selling to get the lady to accept her new arm. Huh, stupid spiel--"Each artificial limb is es-

pecially equipped to receive sensory electric nerve impulses from the natural extremity's base. For GENERATIONS, scientists have worked to design a limb superior in every particular--all the way down to your replaceable plastic skin, complete with tiny hairs and fingerprints."

I feel like a game show girl gliding fingers over car accessories. "Don't worry, sir, I'm sure your wife'll soon feel this arm is better than her natural one."

Oh, yes, don't forget to touch the patient on the shoulder for reassurance. We must make sure he doesn't seem repulsive to us.

The first time I practiced this nurse-reassurance was in front of my family; Mom was appalled. She was disgusted that I would advocate this sort of lying about Nature's Ways. Mom was a big one on 'Nature's always perfect'--no make-up, no pierced ears, no permanents. She simply didn't tolerate anyone who needed help to enhance appearance. To Mom nature graciously gave us all perfect beauty;

to add to it was a sin.

But Mom could afford to say that: she always looked beautiful. Though she had a few damnable flaws, she overlooked them and went on to demand that people do and be what she wanted. I remember walking through the zoo when I was . . . I don't know, maybe five, and Mom pointed out a lady I thought looked like a movie star. She and the men around her threw popcorn to the ducks.

"Gracey, that's a BAD lady," Mom hissed in my ear. "Look how she cakes that filth on her face. She looks so fake."

I stared with great awe. She was beautiful. Everybody liked her; she smiled so pretty. She looked like a rainbow--orange bracelets, red lips, and blue fingernails. Past her I noticed an old man standing. Maybe he was a WOR VETERNARIAN (we learned about them in kindergarten.) He held a metal hook-arm to his tummy. He looked like my grandpa. I wandered up to him and reached to touch his hook. Mom turned around, not realizing I had left

her side, and yelped when she saw me. Immediately she snatched me away muttering, "How dare he come out in public flaunting that Thing!"

He wasn't so scary.

Let's see, disinfect open flesh; check. Sponge debris; check. Apply plastic limb . . . ; check . . . Placating touches--yep, everything's all taken care of.

At the front desk, Grace checked off the duties listed on her clipboard. She stopped writing and glanced down at a book left behind: Trauma. It was probably a candy-stripper's. She picked it up and opened it to a dog-eared page:

"When a traumatic accident occurs, the person is left feeling weak, vulnerable, and exposed. He feels people around him are somehow stronger than he is. In his developing paranoia, he believes everyone has been in an accident and that he is alone in feeling failure for not overcoming the shock. If he has an obvious handicap, this defect will become a symbol of shame."

My first time assisting in the operating room . . . Screams . . . Blood . . . They were so frightening. The patient just lay there

in clamps, straining, neck muscles tense and fanned, wrists bucking against the leather restrainers, his crushed foot being lopped off.

In time she felt nothing for her patients' pain or supposed humiliation. She just did her job.

Grace looked down at her fingernails, streaked white and a little too dry from overpolishing; she thought the standard pink-with-white-tipped fingernails plain. The hospital didn't allow colored nails, so every evening off the job, she painted them. Every morning, she scraped the enamel off again, leaving the nails even uglier.

"It's your own fault, they're fake nails."

Grace looked down at her nails and saw a fleck of bright red enamel at the base of her cuticle. The color reminded her of her Mom's succulent, ruddy-red cherry pies.

I was planting potatoes a couple of weeks ago. I had forgotten my gloves but went right on planting. Some dirt clotted in my fingernails so I

stood up and flicked it out. I glanced through the kitchen window. Mom was baking. She made the best, reddest cherry pies there ever were. There's no way I could ever do all the stuff Super-Mom does.

Mom looked around the room and through the kitchen doorway, but didn't notice me watching through the window. She walked over to the Locked Drawer, above the fridge. She opened it. She sneaked a bottle of food coloring to pour in the cherry filling--the kind you see in maraschino cherries--USD Red No. 405.

"It's no big deal. Why should I care if she lied to me? But how could she be such a hypocrite?"

Grace tore the white off her thumbnail.

"You're no better than anyone else--you don't have an edge either."

As Grace mused, she walked stiff and straight into her patient's room. This last patient was a car accident victim who had a badly crushed arm taken off. But before the accident, the woman had had

problems with arthritis anyway; her hand was so knuckled that it allowed no flexibility. Grace knew that when the last of the drugs wore off, the woman would cry a little for losing her natural arm. But she'd get over it when she'd see what her new arm could do.

"Ma'am, it's okay--you're okay--No, don't cry anymore--Look, there's no more mess."

This lady was throwing a fit for letting the doctors throw away her arm. It seemed to Grace that this woman should be thankful for a more fully moveable hand and arm; SHE'D HAVE TO GET USED TO IT.

"You have to get used to it--it's better this way."

Grace practically pumped the plastic arm in a frantic demonstration of its flexibility.

"Mom, I mean, Ma'am, it works better than the old one--"

Grace started to shout at the lady. The squeamish doctor who met her in the morning ran in to check out the commotion. He was surprised to see Grace flushed, shaking angrily, and contorting the patient's arm.

"--Grace, whoa, honey. Sit down a minute."

"I-I'm fine . . . just need to clean

everything up." She shook off his hands and walked out, supporting the wall.

"I have to find something to do-- What am I supposed to do?"

Automatically she pushed through the OR doors, and saw a full brown garbage bag. She lifted and slung it over her shoulder. She strode to the freezer, threw the bag in, and closed the door tight.

"All you have to do is get used to it--it doesn't hurt."

She walked down the hall, eyes glassy. As she thought, she traveled faster and faster until she heard a thunk; it was a little boy. She had kneed him in the chest just hard enough to put him off balance but caught him again by the shoulders to break his fall.

"--What?"

"Who were you talking to? Is my mommy awake yet?" She looked right in the face of the blond little boy and felt a shock go through her.

"What?" she repeated. Grace examined the boy's face. He blinked. She gaped as only his right eyelid lowered. The left lid must not have worked quite as well, it only closed half-way; a glass eye twitched so that the pupil stared off to the right. It was pale blue and watery. Though he

looked like he was going to cry, the whole: Blue, Glassy, and Twitching--made him look slightly cross-eyed and silly. She almost threw up.

"Is my mommy awake?" he insisted.

Oh God, wait a minute. Not now, why do I have to go through this again? People here are two-thirds plastic; it doesn't even phase me . . . something about that glass eye-too vulnerable--weak--

I was nine, I think. I remember a Grandpa man, a mountain man who said he'd grown up in Alaska; "I say what I please and don't cover up nothin' nohow." (I liked him.) He worked lining the huge Alaskan pipeline through the timber country. Our family ate grits n' butter with the Grandpa man on the first night in the camp. Then my sisters, brother, and I gathered close to Grandpa man as he told us stories: Indian bird myths of the totem, and legends about elves and talking trees. He knew so much. I especially liked the stories of Big Foot. As we listened,

he roared like Saskatchewan, Big Foot, and we shivered. This was much better than robot cartoons on t.v. The evening Grandpa man showed us how to call Big Foot, Grandpa's son, Markus, popped out of his puppet to join in. At first we kids thought Markus was Big Foot and screamed. Then we laughed; he wasn't hairy and scary. Markus sat down next to me and we started talking about Alaska. He was more gentle than his dad. He liked flowers and animals and stuff like that.

I didn't notice anything strange about him. In fact, he was my friend from the start. But I felt weird being around him because he was so smart. He thought of all the questions of the universe, even what Big Foot probably thinks about. That night I went to bed that boy's devoted servant.

In the morning, my new friend Markus was waiting at the community grits-pot. He didn't turn towards me right away, I could only see his profile. I noticed his

cheek a little puffy, as if a bee had stung him. I asked if that's what happened. He looked puzzled and then pulled a mirror out of his shirt pocket and said he probably got a speck of dust in his eye.

Why did he carry a mirror with him? I resolved to get one too.

For a minute he looked hard at me, and I just then noticed his eye wasn't quite right. He turned away before I could figure it out. I saw the back of his head and his elbows sticking out like he was squeezing a pimple of something. He stopped and bent to the stream to wash something in his hand. I still didn't get what he was doing. As he sluiced the thing under water, it turned slightly within his palm as a wave washed over that white orb; I saw the blue pupil of his eye looking up at me. I remember yanking his shoulder up to face me. I looked into his face and saw the eyelid sink into a hole.

I ran away somewhere, sometime. Mom caught me by the hair and yelled at me for not playing with my friend; she didn't know

he had a glass eye either. I couldn't let him look at me anymore. His eye had looked through me.

There was no blood or mess and I couldn't take it. He accepted it; that was the edge. That's okay, he didn't need me anymore.

"Hey, is my mommy awake?"

Markus could stand to look in his mirror. It probably doesn't even bother him. Unless someone runs away.

Grace focused in on the child. She had gone into medicine thinking she could face her revulsion. She saw worse messes. She thought she was gradually getting used to and forgetting what people looked like on the inside.

This one thing--this glass eye, she couldn't quite recover from. Grace could not clean up her flaw. But she didn't run away this time; she looked at the child.

"Here, hold my hand, we'll go see where your mommy is."

Grace swallowed hard, and didn't say anything, just let him hook his small hand in her fingers and tried not to think about his glass eye. At that point, she tried not to think about anything at all.

Stones Under Her Pillow

by Rhonda Pennings

She sits on the mattress
on the apartment floor,
A commanding figure
of a dark haired,
bright eyed woman
whose massive hands
tap rhythmically on
the faded sheets.

She speaks of past lovers
whose shadows empty her heart,
of wayward children
who twist and turn
upon darkened pathways,
Of cosmic forces
that whisper to her,
promenading strange syllables.

Her large hands clutch
clearly polished, speckled stones
hidden under her pillow.
"The vibration of these stones,"
she murmurs, "echoes life's constant motion.
They keep my heart and mind in flux.
They speak to me when I sleep."

Outside her apartment
Nature comes alive
with vibrant force.
Large boisterous branches
quiver, creak and sway
reach to touch the speckled gems,
fall down to worship her.

B.A. School Consultantship

by Dr. George Stickel

Naively I wander down the banks of the Rio de la Plata.

In consultant's clothes I stray
for a spring stroll.

Beneath the broad-leaved trees
which protect the river's edge,
hidden from the school's chore,
I seek a chance to see Argentina.

The land hides from me.

Lovers on abandoned track

eye with nervous wonder

my intrusion.

Forms of men flee

ahead of me down the wooded path.

Separated by language, taste, and task

the land evaporates before me.

Protected by my ingles,

I gaze at shipping moving through the channel.

Beneath the clean-aired city,

dwarfed by the river,

whose wide flow stretches beyond the horizon,

and lost below the foliage,

I gaze--a foreign soul.

What lies hidden, I'll never know.

Entiendo un poco.

Perdone!

Yo soy de los Estados Unidos!

Forgive my piercing eyes.

I seek the beauty not permitted

to casual foreigner.

So I return to lecture, books, and building.

Perm Heaven

by David Harding

Last January I was struck hard by the Asian Flu as the sickness spread like wildfire through campus. The mere fact that I acquired the flu is of no great significance. What is, however (at least I am convinced of the fact), is a peculiar thing that happened to me on the day the flu reached its peak in my temporarily frail body. For a week or so after the strange happenstance, I tried to deceive myself into believing I had seen it on late-night television or in some macabre movie; the mere thought of it scared me so as to vanquish the dream from my mind. But, in the few weeks subsequent, I slowly began to sort the images out in my mind and apprehensively reached this conclusion: I must relate my vision to others.

It was a frigid Wednesday when the fever reached its pitch. The day appeared wintery-heavenly: there was not a cloud in the azure sky. Forced to sit through Man and Nature third hour with my coat on because I had the chills, sweat

beaded on my forehead as intermitted fever racked my body. After an eternity of mitosis and meiosis, the hour ended. I burst open the doors of VPH anticipating crisp, fresh air, but my back stiffened and I winced as an arctic gale penetrated my bones to the core. I fast became delirious. Not half-way from VPH to the PAC (I had choir fourth hour) my forehead was glazed with sweat. My head spinning, I watched as the last leaf of the huge quaking aspen circled its way to the ground. The laughter of fellow choir members echoed in my ears as my world turned black and I fell, passed out.

As if to smelling salts, my nose twitched to the distinct smell of beauty parlors, and I awoke. A huge iron gate was before me. It opened, as if sensing my presence. Making out the details of a lacquered city through the fog, I was impelled to step inside. The gate crashed behind me, jarring me out of my trance. When I turned back to the city, a woman stood

smiling before me. Her white teeth glistened like polished pearls, contrasting her thick, dark eyelashes; she was a dead-on for Leona Helmsley. "Welcome, David Robert Harding." Pouring forth like honey and not unlike milk, the words subdued me. "Welcome to Perm Heaven. I am the Mascara Queen." The mere fact that she knew my name calmed and excited me and prevented her latter words from sinking in. I was putty in her arms as she opened the door of and sat me in a '77 pink Buick Electra.

I noticed the street sign: Revlon Avenue. The car eased ahead to top out at five miles an hour. Out of the mist and to our right appeared a woman whose golden hair hung low in curls. I felt like I was in a Martin Scorsese movie: in the car we crept by her; her head slowly turned my way. She had a wide smile on her face; her eyes sparkled; she waved at me. I smiled and waved back and coyly glanced over at the Mascara Queen as she turned the Electra left onto Lilt Avenue. The Queen didn't return my glance. She was grinning. We passed stores whose display windows were crowded with mannequins. A clone of the girl we had just passed--except her curls were chestnut--caught my eye to the right again. Out of the corner of my eye I

noticed the Mascara Queen ease her foot off the gas. Again we drove slowly by, and the girl's actions imitated those of the previous one. She waved, I waved. Then I did a double-take. The girl WAS a clone: her face was a mask of the blonde. "You're mighty perceptive, David. You are indeed in Perm Heaven." I lunged for the door, but not before the queen power-locked it. Now she was laughing like the wicked witch of the west. "Where are you trying to go, David? Isn't this always what you wanted, perpetual Budweiser-ad beauties?" she shrieked. Flailing my arms and kicking the door I yelled, "Let me out of here! Let me out of here!"

I opened my eyes, gasping for air. Dr. Schouten was fanning my face. Randy Faber and Derrick DeHann were helping her, holding down my writhing limbs. I vaguely made out, "David, David, everything's going to be all right. You were just having a bad dream." When I finally came to and saw Dr. Schouten's comforting smile, a feeling of joy came over me like I had never felt before; I was in the choir room-- it HAD only been a dream. Hadn't it? When I shakily stood up and turned to sit down, I froze wide-eyed with terror as I heard Maureen say behind me, "Crystal, did you get a new perm? It looks really nice . . ."

The Green

by Kristi Vander Werff

My mind soared today,
as thoughts rolled through me
like a rushing sea.

My soul leapt,
as I sensed anew
the green pushing forth
from the dry branches.

Oh sweet joy,
to find a new path,
inside of me.

The "Kent Redeker Rule"

by Kent Redeker

I once read an article in Sports Illustrated about Daryl Dawkins, the man who during his pro basketball career inspired new NBA rules making it illegal to wear jewelry during a game and making it a technical foul for shattering the glass backboards with a dunk. Within the article was a sentence stating something to the effect of: Every so often, a player rewrites the record books, but it's rare that a player rewrites the rule books. So, I guess I can be proud that I inspired a new rule at my old high school, and I'm proud of what I did to cause the rule. But the rule itself? I wish it would be revoked.

It started out innocently enough at a football pep rally in our high school gym. Our cheerleaders had concocted a little contest of skill which involved eating Jello made in our school colors and drenched in whipped cream as fast as possible. I was arbitrarily chosen as one of the contestants who would inhale orange Jello in an attempt to inspire the football team to play their hearts out that night. As I took my seat

in front of the jello that would soon be rammed down my esophagus, I glared at the competitors. I could see that my naive opponents thought that they had a chance to beat me. Ha! Did they think my mother had served Jello at every evening meal since I was six for no reason? I had over ten years of training on my side!

Then we were informed--to the delight of the student body sitting on the bleachers--that we were to eat our whipped cream covered treat without using our hands as this would psych up the players even more. This new development broke the will of most of my adversaries. I was undaunted.

The starting command was given and the slurping sounds began. My ignorant competitors tried biting at the corners, but I knew that sucking and swallowing were the only worthwhile actions. Sure, this almost caused me to violently regurgitate a couple times, but my adrenaline level was so high that I didn't care. As I vacuumed up my last globule of Jello with my lips, I

jumped from my seat and raised my hands in victory.

To this day I'll swear up and down that I won. However, at the same instant that I signaled my triumph, our high school principal/football coach had also eaten his last bit of Jello. Of course, I protested when he was declared the winner, but to no avail. Soon, I came to the obvious realization that the Jello-eating contest was a fraud. It was fixed. I mean, think about it, he was the high school principal/football coach; he could have mailed in his victory. I never had a chance.

As I got up to leave my chair in defeat, I noticed several piles of unfinished Jello on the paper plates of the slower contestants. I'm sure a devilish grin must have spread across my face as a plan to get back at the world for robbing me of my victory brewed within my head.

I picked up a plate of Jello, turned, and launched it into the student body. The members of the crowd--who weren't showered with orange Jello particles--squealed with glee. A few more plates found their way into the bleachers. Then, I grabbed two plates and slowly strolled towards the band. They were helpless. Even though they could see me

stalking them, they were right in the middle of a song and thus couldn't move. So, I waited until I was at point blank range and then fired my Jello cluster bombs. It's funny to watch people holding large brass instruments move so quickly in so limited a space. I imagine the baritone players were wiping gelatin residue from their instruments that night.

I knew my final quarry was the most mobile, and I was down to my last plate of Jello. I had to make this shot count. So I feigned another attack on the crowd, then whirled around and fired upon those cheerleaders who had declared the wrong Jello eater as the winner. Bull's-eye.

By this time, the audience was grabbing the larger chunks of Jello and throwing them back at me. I then proceeded to make a hasty retreat and the pep rally continued even though the cheerleaders had orange spots on their skirts.

A few years later, some parents wanted to put on a pep rally at the school. When they asked permission to do the ole' pie-in-the-face routine, they were vetoed by the powers that be. It seems a new rule now stated that no food may be used at a pep rally. They call it the "Kent Redeker Rule"

Errant Eros--or Agape?

by Mary Van Rheenen

Jester of the universe,

do you yet toy with human hearts?

Spark fires here,

stir quests forth there,

in search of hearths of chalices

that we will never hold?

Or are you loving wise

and not some stupid boy

with arrows asking,

careless,

to be shot?

The Preacher's Word

by Dr. George Stickel

Arms outspread with draping black robe

Silver haired orator

Speaking the word

On angiosperm wings

Alighting upon the hearts

Of the listening children.

A congregation intent

Yet tempted within and without doors.

The baptized words fall fertile

Upon rocks and soil

Amid weeds and scorching sun . . .

The words continue on

Flowing as wind carried seeds

Over the parched soil of human experience.

Broken Melody

by Cheri Waggoner

Each time that song
is on the radio
I stop what I'm doing
to
clutch the photograph
of us,
together.

We stood so close in a daze
hiding our true feelings.
Running through my mind
the lyrics seem like
they were meant
for us.

Each phrase holds a different
memory of our love.

We had a melodious one.
Now that melody is broken
and I cry when
clutching the photograph
of us
together.

To Frequent Fliers Only

by Grace Ann De Boer

Some people screen their horoscopes to check out what's going to happen that day. I don't need to. Today I'm going to fly on an airplane and my woman's intuition (that never lets me down--unless I have PMS) screamed a warning in my ear. And I know it's true. I'm gonna die on the airplane. In preparation for impending doom, I took the responsibility long ago to leave diaries behind so that my friends can write an adequate biography on Brave Grace Ann De Boer. Still, the thought of being smashed to earth so hard that parents identify me by teeth only is quite distasteful. Besides, I'm sure everyone wants me around longer so---maybe somebody'd better restrain me from boarding the "Flight of Death."

The scenario starts as I, always in red flats, step across the friendly waiting room and begin my long journey down the

Yellow Curved Hall. Slowly the scene turns black and white. My ruby slippers stop midway from the end of the tunnel; I turn, and take one last look at my parents.

"Good-bye, dear ones," I think. "Hope you CAN forgive yourselves for refusing me that 20 bucks for the trip--For I'll be dead tomorrow . . ." I again turn to the end, dragging my feet forward. (It's at this time that I burst into tears--Good Judy Garland stuff, huh?)

Though I weep, the folks don't rush to comfort me; their generosity is repressed by a tailored stewardess nasally repeating, "No non-passengers beyond this point, Sirs."

Finally, I reach the end. Did I hear my father's voice? Alas, I can not hear them BECAUSE THE BOZO STUFFING HIS TRENCH COAT AND NOSE TISSUE IN THE ABOVE-STALL WHEEZES SO LOUDLY--I forget to

listen.

Okay, I'm sitting down. On my right sits the bozo with appropriate business-man stone-face, batteries not included. (Look at him--ya know, they say that to honor the god Vishnu, Indians oil their granite statues. I believe that somehow his hair got in the way of the more devout Indian worshippers.) I stared at him all the while I made smart comments to myself. He stares a hole in the seat cushion ahead. I twist to the other side and look down the aisle--more rocks; I'm in a flying Zen garden! Boy, if the plane tips unexpectedly, I'll die under the landslide way before we make contact with the ground.

A gong resounds over the loud-speaker, in warning that the stewardess has come to welcome us aboard; "Ladies and gentlemen, may I have your attention?" In unison, the rocks bow their acquiescence. "Well good, BECAUSE HAVE WE GOT A HELLUVA SHOW FOR YOU! on Flight 666!"

Our nasal stewardess swoops the curtain off the rod and snarls down at us. We stare back at her. (When I was five, I wanted to be a stewardess like her:

Bette Davis eyes, Lola Falona lips, Dolly Parton . . . hair . . .) Wasting no time, though revved up with our admiration, she grabs a seat belt from the Vishnu's bin and waves it in the air. We all know what's coming. In Gregorian chant, the rock garden and she intone, "Please buckle your seat belts . . . you fasten them like this . . . you may not unfasten them unless you have to go potty . . ."

. . . potty. Wait a minute--that's not in the airplane-policy spee---

--Whoosh! The centrifugal force pulls my head into a pointy seat cushion while my hair splays back and yanks at the scalp for release. We tilt upward, climbing ever higher, and finally level. As the force relaxes, I discover my elbows now bent the wrong way. So, did The Force make my Vishnu's elbows bend backwards? Nope, he's intact. He was probably carved in the Egyptian archaic style with arms stuck to his body. He continues his chant and I recover enough to mimic with the rest of them:

" . . . the escape doors are there." I point; Stewardess charges at me and rasps, "Please point with your index

and middle finger, with thumb discreetly locked to the palm, Ma'am!"

"Sorry, I'll . . . pay more attention," I blush.

Oops! After Stewardess finishes reprimanding me, she flicks a stray curl behind her ear and accidentally knocks off a chunk of make-up. She doesn't notice, and smiles at her rock collection, who pass the peanuts. As her mouth stretches, the base falls down in shards; her eyes, lips and nose crumble. (but her hair luckily stays in place--thank goodness for long-lasting hold from Final Net.) Pieces of make-up spray the ground, artifacts of a ruined woman. Stewardess is no more; in her place hobbles an escapee midget from the Wizard of Oz. The sight is so ghastly I courteously look down.--Dang it! She got a chunk of lipstick in my 7-up--ohh, there's no pop like home's.

"Ladies and gentlemen, the captain would beg you to view the wondrous sites two million billion miles below. On the right, the great Circle of Dis."

I knew the terrain well; why do pilots insist

on taking this route? So Dante made it; he was bored and had to have something to write about. Leave it to authors to make normality a hell and hell a normality. As I mumble these words, I fall asleep, anesthetized by canned air.

I awaken to the beat of oil dripping on my face. Somewhere during the nightmare, my face found its way to Vishnu's shoulder (and his hair dripped on my nose.) All the passengers had disembarked. I had no idea how long I had slept. I grab my carry-on, resist the Steward--I mean Midget's pleadings to "Please fly the friendly skies with us again . . ." and race down the endless corridor.

Lights race ahead of me and I run for Logan's Run. At the end of the tunnel wander Aunt Dorthy and Uncle Ralph. They ask how my flight was. "Fine." I answer bravely. It would break their hearts to know what I'd been through. Of course, my experience would make a fine addition to my biography. I'll make sure I leave some diaries behind as I leave this earth on my real return trip home.

Awaken

by Tom Walters

I'm sorry,
It's just that time.
Sun masked by snow,
whirling past its face.
Wooden skeletons scar the pristine,
White woolen flakes woven into warp and woof.
Earth sleeps.

My mind...
My mind!
Sleeps inside a cave of obsidian hair,
Hurt, Pain swirls, stains the,
Barren mindscape with a hue not,
So comfortably numb; Sultry, Sleepy.
Wake Me!

Alone still, (still)
No noise,
Echoes remind me ... silence.

Shooting

by David Harding

The night before I couldn't wait to get there. Edgemont was a dusty railroad town on the outskirts of the Black Hills where my relatives were as abundant as the coal trains that passed through it. Every vacation we drove the nine-hour trip to Edgemont. I knew it was a stifling little town--my dad was one of the lucky few who escaped to college--but I loved it; I could visit my cousins and get away from my parents.

But this Labor Day weekend was like every other vacation--we just got to town and Dad wanted to leave. Waiting in the living room for Grandma to call us to lunch, Dad announced his plan for the day: drive through the Hills, soak up some fresh air, and possibly stop in Rapid City, the only decent-sized town within 300 miles. I suggested we see a movie, The Outlaw Josie Wales.

Mom shot a glare at me. "David, we'll only be here for three days. You don't really want to waste your time at a movie, do you?"

I stood at the living room en-

trance. "Sure, why not?" I glared back.

Mom turned to Dad, who was reading his new Journal of Modern Art Education, then back to me. "Dad was thinking we could go to the art museum. Besides, that movie's R-rated. I heard it's pretty violent."

"So what. Big deal." I trudged into the living room and stopped by Mom who was standing by the window, all five-foot-one of her. I think I noticed for the first time how much taller I was than her. "Come on, Mom. I'm thirteen." I thrust my chest out, "Uncle George takes me and Lance to R-rated movies, and we watch 'em on cable when I stay overnight there." I could really have scared them if I wanted; they would have keeled over knowing some of the raunchy films I watched.

"Well, you're with US now, and you'll be fourteen in a couple months." She sidestepped me and sat down. "Maybe we'll take you to an 'R' movie then."

I knew that Dad would say the same thing. Or maybe something worse. He loved discussing "immoral" American

culture.

He was sort of sprawled diagonally across the couch, practically taking the whole thing up. One day I would be taller than him, or at least I wished; if I didn't grow any more it'd be mom's fault. Dad was a lanky six foot three and had short blond hair. Once when I was a little kid I saw the Chuck Connors, "The Rifleman" on T.V. and thought it was Dad. I tossed my head. "Come on Dad," I sighed. "Why do we always have to go to some dumb museum?"

Pushing his round-rimmed glasses back on his nose, he looked up from the journal and smiled. "We can always see a movie, David. I thought you liked Frederick Remington's work. Maybe you'll learn something new." He pointed to the open magazine. "You should read this. It's a really good article about how everyone has a need to creatively express themselves, even little kids."

He just kept smiling at me, as if I really cared. "You always go to museums and we go to that dumb one every time we come here." I paused, then said, "Movies are creative." Ha, gotcha. I smiled.

Dad nodded his head, "Well, I guess you're kind of right there. But you're only thirteen--you know you can't go to an "R" movie." He gave me a sly grin. "Besides, we wouldn't have time to do that and drive through the Hills and stop at Custer to see Great Grandma."

Actually, I was about to drop it. Not anymore. Great Grandma lived in an old-age home. She looked like one of those shriveled apple dolls, slouched interminably in the same rocking chair. The only person she ever recognized was her first-born grandson, Dad.

"Mom, do we have to go see Grandma?" I scowled at Dad. "We always stay so long, and she never knows who we are anyway."

Dad smiled; I wasn't doing any damage. "You'll live, David," said Mom. "Grandma probably won't be alive much longer. Every time we see her might be the last."

Dad laid the journal down, picked himself up off the couch like a domestic cat and ambled toward the kitchen. Stopping beside me, he laid his hand on my shoulder and smiled down at me. "David, it's a good thing to do. It doesn't matter if she knows us or not," he purred. "And my parents would really appreciate it. Mom's right, she probably won't live too much longer."

I turned and walked toward the door, his hand dropping off my shoulder. "Well, you guys can go see Grandma and stay all day if you want." I opened the door. "I'm going to George's to see Lance."

Back home in Iowa, I wouldn't dream of turning my back on them and leaving, partly because I had nowhere to

go. But here, in Edgemont, surrounded by relatives, I could flee the stifling, "can't do that, should do this" atmosphere. Once outside, I hopped on my grandpa's rusty old three-speed and pedalled down the drive.

Mom opened the door and stood half in, half out. "David, you better be back in thirty minutes," she yelled. "Did you ask Grandpa," her voice trailed off, "if you could use his bike?"

I was already a block away and didn't look back. I imagined what it would be like if George was my dad. Lance and I could watch any movie we wanted. Lance had told me about the really good ones on late at night. Tonight we could stay up till 2:00 A.M. watching dirty movies and eating what Mom and Dad branded "junk food" till we were sick. George didn't waste any time dragging his family to visit Grandma. George let Lance do anything.

The second I set foot in the house I smelled the familiar mixed aroma of Beef Stroganoff and cigarette smoke. Aunt Carolyn had made lunch--I often wondered if that's all she could make--and Uncle George was around somewhere. I'd never seen him without a cigarette, except in church one Christmas, the only time I'd seen him there. Carolyn held the refrigerator door open with one hand and held a carton of milk with the other. She saw me

and a smile lit her face. "David!" She set the carton inside, closed the door and rushed over to hug me. "You little doll. You're getting so big! How are you doing?"

"Good. I'm doing good." Mom wouldn't like that. I'm doing well, thank you. Not only was it bad English, nobody was good in God's eyes. We are all "fallen creatures."

I heard Uncle George's thick steps before he strolled into the room. He had just come home from the railroad and had on his scuffed, tar-black work boots. Leaving the cigarette in his mouth when he talked, he sounded like a blonde-haired gangster. He tousled my hair with permanently grease-stained hands. "Hey, Dave. So how ya doin'?"

"Hey, George." I wanted to say, "Hey Dad."

"So Dave, did you drive over here or what?" He grinned at me. "Or doesn't your dad let you take the car by yourself yet?"

"Yeah, well . . . um," I shifted my eyes to the T.V. in the living room. "Mom and Dad are driving up through the Hills today." I bit my lip. "Or else I would've." I knew that George let Lance drive, though he was only three months older than me. Dad wouldn't let me drive. He probably wouldn't let me until I was eighteen.

George laughed, his lips tight so the stub of his cigarette wouldn't drop out of his mouth. "Don't tell me," he said, faking he was serious, "they're gonna stop and see Granny. And you didn't want to go?"

I laughed. "No way."

"Yeah, well I don't blame ya," he took a drag, the cigarette disappearing in his mouth. "She doesn't know who anybody is. What's the use?" He exhaled; the stub reemerged, wet. "Be dead soon anyway."

Carolyn tried defending Great Grandma, even though she wasn't blood-related. "That poor woman, she deserves to have visitors too." She poked a finger in George's chest. "What if you were up there all by yourself?"

All of us laughed, including Lance, who had just come in the room. He slid up behind me and thrust his back up against mine--the first thing he always did--and said, "Looks like I'm taller than you David. Mom, who's taller?"

"Maybe with your curly hair," I said.

"Yeah, you wish, shorty." He spun around to face me. "So when did you guys get here?"

"This morning at about three o'clock."

"How long are you staying?" His

eyebrows raised. "Hey, you wanna go hiking?"

"Yeah, sure." So I wouldn't be home in thirty minutes.

Their house was halfway up the hill on the north side of the valley that Edgemont was nestled in. Directly beyond their backyard was a forest of pine trees, and further back, steep rocks.

George lit another cigarette and looked out of the corner of his eye at us. "You guys should bring a gun along. Get rid of some of those stray dogs," he chuckled.

Lance's eyes widened, "Yeah, that's a good idea. We could bring a .22 and shoot some birds or rabbits or something."

I'd never hunted before. I always had toy guns, but never bought myself a real one, much less asked my parents to. Guns were not for little boys. "Yeah. Yeah, let's do it." When I saw Mom and Dad later tonight, I could tell them all about it.

At the gun case we grabbed a .22, some bullets, then walked out the door. Climbing over the rock and cement fence in the back yard, we headed towards "Star Rock", a huge arrowhead-shaped rock that had a fifty-foot metal star hanging on it with 500-watt, virgin-white light bulbs that were lit at Christmas.

"Hey, Lance, it must be great having your dad." I picked up a pine cone.

"Back home I can't do anything. Have to go to church every Sunday. And we can't even drink soda, it's 'unhealthy'." I flung the cone at a tree. "I bet my dad has never seen a Playboy in his life. Probably wouldn't know a tit if he saw one." I looked at Lance and said, "Remember that time your dad caught us looking at one of his Playboys? He just laughed and didn't say anything. Your dad's so cool."

Something caught my eye ten feet in front of me. I could see a long and narrow shiny black rod, half buried in wild grass and pine cones. I darted in front of Lance to see what it was.

"Hey, Lance, check it out." I bent to pick it up, holding a rifle that looked brand-new. "Someone must be pretty stupid to lose this. How could you lose a rifle?" The only flaw was a tiny patch of rust on one side of the barrel where it had laid on the damp ground. I stood stroking the shaft.

"That was just laying there?" He reached for my gun, "Hey, let me see it."

I carefully placed it in his hands. He shook it and the BB's rattled inside. "It's a BB/pellet pump gun." He pumped it--it could've used a couple drops of oil--took aim at a tree, and brought it back down. "Looks brand new."

He brought it up to take aim again. "Hey, I found it." I grabbed it from him.

"You have your own gun."

I pumped it myself, and took aim. The gun felt solid in my hands. I shot at a tree. Ping! "It still works, did you hear that?"

Before he could answer, a high-pitched croak permeated the forest.

"What in the world is that? I said.

"It's a frog, whatta'ya think?"

I pointed with my gun toward where the sound had come from. "Let's go kill it."

"Yeah, shhh, it sounds like it's coming from that pond over there." Lance wheeled and we stole towards the pond, both of us clutching our rifles.

The frog was still bellowing as we drew near the pond, which was a mere twenty feet across.

Lance whispered, "Man, he sounds like a monster frog or something."

We tiptoed up to the pond, scanning the tall wild grass along the edge of the water for the frog.

I tugged Lance's arm by the sleeve and pointed to the other side. Floating on a leaf was a sleek, splotchy-green frog, three inches long. Lance stifled his laughter as he said, "Whoa, big daddy all right." He levelled the .22 on his shoulder.

"Hey," I whispered. "Let me shoot it." I grabbed the barrel. "I've never shot anything. Let me try my gun."

He lowered his gun and I raised mine to my shoulder and took aim. Like a naked sunbather, the frog just sat there on the leaf while I aimed. I gripped my gun. It was rigid. Finally, I shot.

The ping sounded more like the roar of a cannon because of the immediate silence that followed.

I was sure I had slaughtered the frog, but still perched on the leaf he had only floated closer to the shore.

Lance nudged me in the back. "Nice miss. I wonder if I could miss that bad."

I didn't respond, only took aim once more, and didn't hesitate this time. The frog had quit croaking by now, but as I squeezed the trigger, he croaked again.

This time the silence scared me. I knew I shot him, and didn't want to look.

"Hey, hot shot! I think you got him. Oh yeah. Hey look. That really tore him up."

I couldn't see the little frog at first, but I wasn't exactly trying very hard. I followed Lance's pointing finger; my body locked as my eyes froze. He lay floating upside down near what looked by not like a bullet-ridden leaf. One hind leg was dangling by a mere thread of skin. I wanted to go grab him and bury him or at least hide him behind some foliage; with his leg and exposed white belly he looked obscene. -I didn't want anybody gawking at him.

I stood there stunned and silent, like a mourner at a funeral. All I could think of was my dad. Once when I was a kid we were hiking in a forest like this and I stepped on a centipede. He told me that even though it was an animal, I had taken a life. Dad, what would you say now?

Lance startled me by patting my back. "Good shot, buddy. Really nailed him that time."

Already looking down, I checked my watch. "Lance." I was mumbling. "We'd better get going, it's ten after three already . . . I'm going anyway." I clutched my stomach, trying not to double over. I felt like throwing up.

He didn't follow me at first. Trancelike, I walked toward Lance's house holding the gun limp beside me so I wouldn't have to look at it. When I got to where I thought I had found it, I dropped it without stopping, still staring ahead toward the house.

Lance ran to catch up and picked up the gun. He held it out to me. "What are you doing?" He waved a hand in front of my face, "David, slow down. You found this, it's yours."

"No, it's not . . . and I don't want it."

Lance beckoned me as I walked past his house. My eyes watered just thinking about the cigarette smoke inside.

For K.A. on Valentine's Day

by Mary Van Rheenen

For those who went to the dance alone

and left, thinking all things--

eyes,

thumbs,

nostrils--

come in pairs;

Count:

Seven days in every week,

Five petals on each apple bloom,

Three wishes, only every three,

though Father, Son, and Spirit, always one.

And as you stand beneath the single moon

surrounded now by countless stars,

Know we, too, need not come in pairs.

Our Father's

by Mary Van Rheenen

I've sung of our fathers' holy faith
surrounded by covenant children
whose Calvinist forebearers fought with
mine
against heresy and the Inquisition.
But I have shared a hymnal, too,
with fellow Catholic pilgrims
in spite of dungeon, fire, and sword;
And I have harmonized
with those Anabaptists
our fathers chained in prisons dark.
We preached together,
as love knows how,
by kindly words and virtuous life--
but with what faith,
and to whose father did we sing?

Prodigal

by Sharon Johnson

Rich and Ann sat on their front steps drinking lemonade while they waited for their son Kevin and his work crew to arrive. In April Kevin, who sold and hung siding for Sears, persuaded them to put steel siding on their house. Six weeks had passed since they placed an order; today the long awaited project was to begin.

"What time did he say he'd be here?" Ann asked.

"Between nine and ten."

"What time is it now?" she inquired.

"Little past ten."

"I wonder where they are." Ann said slouching against the top step.

"Between Minneapolis and here. Be patient, they'll be here," Rich said, gulping down the last of his lemonade.

Ann tapped her watch, "ten-thirty," she said and picked up the lemonade glasses, "I'll wait inside, it's too hot out here."

She went to the laundry room. Tugging to turn jeans inside out, she fumed,

"He's burned us again." She shoved the jeans in the washer then hastily splashed in the detergent. "Every time we think he's reformed--we think 'this time' we can trust him. What are we, blind?" she said slamming the lid.

Ann returned to the dining room; she restacked nine plates from the table. She clanked the silverware into a pile and said, "Now I'll be stuck with all of this food."

In the back yard, Rich kicked the lawn mower, "Start darn it," he growled as he yanked the cord again. The mower choked to a start and Rich raced down the lawn. As he turned for a second swipe, he distractedly cut a swatch through a bed of tulips. The mower spewed shreds of yellow, the orange, then red onto the grass before Rich jerked it back. Through the window, Ann could see him cussing at the mess. She knew that mowing would not ease Rich's doubt in Kevin showing up.

Ann's thoughts reverted to six weeks ago when Kevin had mown the lawn.

Kevin voluntarily mowed the lawn; Rich thought it a sign of change. Rich anxiously believed Kevin had become less self-centered. Kevin had mown, trimmed trees, and repaired a trailer with Rich. Ann truly wanted to believe that Kevin had matured--changed, but even then she felt skeptical. He worked hard, but was it part of a scheme?

When Kevin was sixteen, he would wash the family car a couple of days before he would ask to use it for an out-of-town trip. Rich rarely refused him because, 'Kevin always took such good care of the car.' Kevin knew hard work brought results with Rich; Ann suspected Kevin of refining that ploy. Rich had shrugged off Ann's reminder that Kevin was a master of manipulation. Usually, Kevin forced Rich to feel guilty about the divorce or the difference in treatment between siblings--to GET--money, or a car, or clothes, or tools.

"This time he convinced us he was trustworthy," she whispered. "Hopefully, we weren't wrong." When Kevin was home in April, she and Rich carefully deliberated over placing an order. They placed it because they wanted to give Kevin a chance to prove his trustworthiness, to give him an opportunity to do a job he could be proud of in his own community.

At noon, Rich dragged in, his shirt drenched with sweat. "It feels great in

here." Ann saw drops of sweat dripping from his chin so she poured some lemonade for him while he stripped his shirt and mopped his face with the nearest dish towel. Rich guzzled the lemonade, plopped the glass down and refilled it. He carried it with him as he hurried off for a quick shower before lunch.

Rich dropped in his chair for lunch. Only two places remained set at the extended table. Ann clenched her teeth and thrust her shoulders back as she carried in a bowl of barbecued meatballs and a basket of fresh rolls. After setting them down, she flicked a couple grass blades off the table, "I can't believe I cooked for eleven. How are we going to eat all of this?"

"Ann, you can reheat it for them tomorrow."

"You still believe he's going to show up, don't you? Well, I don't."

"Ann, they've just been delayed. Kevin is more dependable now, remember."

"Well, why hasn't he called?" she said and stopped before blurting, "or isn't he mature enough for that?"

"I don't know," said Rich, who had been trying to ignore his own doubts. "There's no way he can steal the money we invested. It's not as if we wrote the check directly to him."

Ann leaned closer. "I wouldn't put anything past him. He knows just how to twist facts. He gets what he wants!"

Lowering his head, Rich said, "I don't want to discuss this; we need to give him more time."

"Fine." Ann shrugged and tried to finish lunch. "By the way, did you remember to call Harold?" Rich explained his conversation with Harold, but Ann's thoughts reverted to the discussion she and Rich had before Kevin arrived in April. Ann resented Kevin for thinking he could come home as if he hadn't in essence stolen a pick up from them. Oh, Kevin had been smooth that time. First, he made Rich feel guilty for putting all of the other kids except him through college. Next, he built up the "potential" and "stability" of his new job. And no, he didn't need financial help; he just wanted to stay with them until he got on his feet. Finally, after he made Rich feel guilty, he revealed the reason he was home.

"I really need a pick up, Dad. I can't keep this job if I don't have a vehicle to haul equipment."

Those two negotiated and argued until Rich finally gave Kevin the down-payment. After all, it wasn't any more than he would have spent on a year of college tuition. Rich also lent him the rest of the

money on a no-interest basis, just as he had to John, his oldest son, for his first car. After the first two monthly payments, Kevin disappeared. Three years had passed before the April day when he called. He left a message on the answering machine, "Hi, Dad. I'm working in your area. I'll be home for supper."

"The prodigal son returns," Ann said, turning the recording off.

"We need to give him the benefit of the doubt--he may have changed."

"Kevin? Changed? I doubt it." Ann pursed her lips.

"You called him the prodigal son. Remember how the original Prodigal Son's father responded to his homecoming?"

Did the Bible tell them what to do with the prodigal son who returned and left again? Each time he returned he hurt them more. Why didn't the Bible tell them to protect themselves?

The next morning, Rich returned to his vigil on the front steps. He thumbed through the Daily Globe and stopped to read an article about a runaway girl from Windom who was found dead in Minneapolis on Chicago Avenue. His shoulders slumped as he cleared the lump in his throat. Ann slipped through the front door and sat down next to him.

"I brought you coffee. What's in

the news?"

Rich handed her the paper. "Those poor parents. How awful." Ann shook her head.

"Remember when Kevin ran away?"

"Yeah," she sighed, "stole that van and he wasn't even old enough to drive."

"I thought for sure he'd kill himself or someone else on those icy roads. I never thought I'd be glad to hear he was arrested," Rich said earnestly.

They hashed over the incident and remembered how Kevin suffered from nightmares for a year after coming home.

"All of that just to escape me: the 'wicked step-mother'."

"That's not true, he--"

Ann slapped the cement and blurted, "It's true. He wanted to get to his mother, to tattle about my unreasonable expectations--you know, working in school, picking up his room, and being home by eleven. He hated me and my outrageous demands."

Rich told her it was not her fault, and it wasn't all Kevin's fault either. "If anyone can be blamed, it should be me or Ellen."

"It wasn't you--Ellen just wouldn't let him adjust. She pumped his head full of stupid ideas," said Ann, springing up to pace. "Remember when the boys had the

mumps? Kevin was only five; all week I was confined to the house with them. By the time you came home on Thursday night, I had to get out ALONE. I was going to walk downtown: on my way out the door Kevin caught me and asked if he couldn't please come along. I took him." Ann paused. "On our walk that night he called me Mom for the first time. At first, he didn't even realize it," she said leaning against the fence post, "but, the second time he said it, he stopped--then said, 'oh yeah, I can't call you that'."

Rich stood up and gave Ann a hug. "He just got a little confused."

"He was confused because his mother messed up his brain. Ellen taught him to be a manipulator. She taught him to be deceptive."

They sat down on the steps again. Ann said, "I'm sick of him manipulating us every time he comes home." She thought back to the help they tried to get for him as an early teen. They had taken him to three psychologists seeking diagnosis. Each had tossed around terms like manic-depressive, schizophrenic, and sociopath, but none of the three was willing to commit himself to a definite cause or treatment. They'd even taken him to the Mayo Clinic in Rochester to determine if there were any physical reasons for his behavior.

Dejected, Ann said, "I think we've

tried everything: doctors, psychologists, pastors, plus providing limits and a structured environment. What else is there?"

"I don't know, but something needs to change." Rich hung his head in his hands. "Maybe he's a manic-depressive. He can be the most likable guy, but when he's on a low--watch out."

"Well," Ann cocked her head and snipped, "I think he's a sociopath. There's no hope for change; he has no regard for others, especially us. He stomps on us every chance he gets," Ann said.

They discussed turning him into the authorities, but decided against it. They knew he would not treat other customers with such inconsideration; clients wouldn't allow it. Ann wanted to cut him off from the family.

"I just want to be rid of his self-centered, manipulative, childish behavior!" she said.

"We can't just cut him off," Rich replied. "There's always hope for change. We just need to make it clear to him that he is no longer accepted as a son. We should still treat him with respect, but as far as I'm concerned, he's no longer welcome to stay in our home."

"Right, I don't want him here to get under our skins anymore. He always makes us feel guilty and twists the truth."

Ann's voice cracked, "I won't have it anymore!"

"I know. He can't be welcome in our home and we won't give him any money."

"Right," Ann said emphatically, "but if he returned and wanted rehabilitation for drugs or alcohol, I would be willing to pay a facility or a doctor for that. But, his slimy hands would never touch the money."

"That's right. He gets no money--only an institution. I still want to help him, but he has sucked my heart dry," said Rich, allowing the silence to enclose them.

Rich broke the silence with an earnest whisper. "Tomorrow I'm going to disinherit him and have the locks on the house changed." Ann knew he was seeking tangible ways to reinforce his decision to cut Kevin off.

Ann sat down and took Rich's hand, "I think that's how it has to be until he proves he can tell us something other than lies."

Rich glanced down to the corner. "Ann, look, there's a red pick-up. It must be Kevin. I told you he had just been delayed."

Ann hopped up toward the door, "I'll go reheat lunch."

"Ann, wait, it turned the other way."

Circles

by Yvonne Meyer

Who are You?
I don't understand.
Changelessly, forever the same,
I am caught in a kaleidoscope.

Eye in my blind reality,
Look around to see You;
Looking-glass self,
Twas a mere reflection.

Caterpillars to butterflies,
Winged victory inching along;
Tear-drop mirrors on the petal,
Who's image do you seek?

I thought it was a race,
Running away into a dark, empty forest;
Echoes, before the deceived twig is broken;
Why did I leave the Path?

The Water sweeter than nectar,
But gathering randomly from bloom to bloom;
Exotic colors and enticing fragrances,
The senses dulled to the sting of death.

Bridled by definite uncertainty,
Upon a carousel of questions never resting;
The organ drones on,
Continuous motion going in circles.

Blackout

by David Harding

At exactly 9:49 Monday night, the sky blanketed Orange City, Iowa. Students at Northwestern College at first started yelling at each other making sure everyone else saw, or didn't see, the same thing: total blackout. Some kids just sat where they were in a class room or the library, but most acted like they had never been in complete darkness before: they ran through the dorm halls yelling and throwing water everywhere and then ran outside. They were in disbelief-- even outside (clouds covered the moon) it was SO dark.

One witty red-head stayed put on a couch in the Rowenhorst Student Center. He hummed a recognizable tune and said in his best T.V. voice, "Welcome to... the Twilight Zone." And then, "Maybe

this is what being caught in the Bermuda Triangle feels like," though of course there was no large body of water within 500 miles. But after sitting in the dark about ten minutes, he began to think that he actually was in some kind of time warp. The total blackness reminded him of camping with his family when he was a boy. He eerily imagined his friends sitting next to him were his parents.

Meanwhile, outside, students began to congregate on either side of Albany Avenue between Colenbrander Hall and the Performing Arts Center. It was so dark that kids milling on one side of the street couldn't see those on the other side until a car passed flashing its lights on them. Someone started throwing objects--boxes, paper--at the other side,

and then a short stocky kid in Bermuda shorts went inside Colenbrander and grabbed the watermelon in his portable refrigerator. The first person to see the huge fruit roared out laughing, "The atomic bomb! We're Harry Truman and they're the commies." (He had learned all about the origins of the Cold War that afternoon in American History.) So, the Allies lowered the boom. It would have landed directly on the enemy's front ranks, all blood-red watermelon flesh and black seeds, scaring some, and scattering most. A spunky bespectacled lad fit for revenge grabbed the biggest chunk and lobbed it back high just as a car crept out of the dark. The chunk, unfortunately, nicked the right front fender of the dark blue car. "Oh crap, it's a cop!" one observant soul yelled. As the car screeched to a halt, students on both sides scattered.

After the cop had crawled back into the dark, a mischievous grin appeared on the boy who had first thrown the watermelon. He grabbed the boy who had thrown it back by the arm, "I got some

firecrackers hidden in my room."

A smile lit the face of the kid with the glasses. "Go get them. We'll meet you back of Colenbrander."

So "the bomber" came back out with \$50 worth of BlackCats; the other four boys laughed--then held their breath

"Thrown'em in the dumpster," one yelled.

So, they were thrown in, and to their delight, the dumpster exploded sounding like a foxhole crowded with machine gun-armed G.I.'s. One guy, who had perhaps seen too many war movies even hit the ground.

When the shooting died down, more firecrackers were thrown in, and kids started gathering; they were drawn to all the racket. The throng slowly blossomed and started to muscle its way back to Albany. Bermuda shorts led the pack and lit a bottle rocket, aiming at a passing car. He felt invincible.

The pack was over a hundred thick by now. It oozed across the street, Bermuda shorts still in the lead. He lit a

bottle rocket and swiveled around aiming it over the students' heads, but lost grip just as it flew. The kids directly behind him screamed and dove out of the way. But, there was not time for the next ones in line. The rocket whizzed by a tall black-haired kid, just missing his forehead as he snapped his head to one side.

He snapped it back and ran at Bermuda yelling, "You moron. What are you trying to do, shoot my eye out?"

Bermuda tried to calm him, yelling back, "I didn't shoot it at you on purpose. Lighten up, man, it was an accident."

But it was too late for "lightening up." The black-haired threw a punch, but Bermuda ducked. The next one--a sucker-punch--landed, and Bermuda wheezed and fell back on the ground. Bermuda got back up. A few kids tried to pry them apart. Ones further back of them wanted to see what was going on. Shoving to the front, they nearly stampeded the fighters who were wrestling on the ground by now. But, a girl frantically waving her arms saved them

as she ran across the street screaming, "There's a fire in the dumpster! There's a fire in the dumpster! I think it blew up!"

The mob of kids turned simultaneously--some ran and others sprinted back across Albany toward their dorms. Most were still in the middle of the street when the fire truck flew over the hill a block away, its red lights flashing and siren piercing the air. Now everyone sprinted to the dorm. Kids were thrown aside and up against the doors trying to get in, but it didn't take long before all were scattering down the halls to their rooms.

Most bunched up in the east wing room however, and stood looking out the back windows at the hooded firemen dowsing the blaze with water canons. Inside one of the pitch black rooms, the kid with the Bermuda shorts laughed as he popped open a can of soda. Looking out the window he remarked, "This blackout's great. We could probably get away with murder."

If I Should Be Able

by Dr. George Stickel

If I should be able to write poetry like Carl Sanburg...

That would make me happy!

--To hear the sounds

And feel the vibrations of a city

working, toiling, sweating, loving.

--To speak to the people and know their song.

A song of pain and joy

A song of visions and losses

A song of America.

If I should be able to paint a picture

Of the hearts of men and women,

Of their children's palpitations,

Of their parents' groans in the nursing homes...

If I should be able to paint a picture

Of the life blood of people...

That would make me happy!

If I should be able to sing a song

With harmony of laboring voices,

With a rhythm of working hands...

If I should be able to sing a song

That celebrates the days of struggles and triumphs,

That strips the covering that hides the soul

If I should be able to sing such a song

That would make me happy!

No Dancing Please

by Julie Van Zee

Doors open.

Staccato chatter,

strained harmony

calling Mom to waltz.

Hodgkin's cuts in.

Doors close.

Mom's dance continues--

we join,

each with solo styles.

Harmony near,

doors open.

Helper

by Dr. John Stackhouse

Stroke victim

(injured in mind, body, and spirit)

lies in hospital

Flaccid

Heavy

Sunk into Self.

Sunny therapist

enters greeting--

a grunt.

She commands, encourages cajoles:

"Lift--I'll do it with you--

c'mon, now. Up . . ."

Therapist rehabilitates resistance

Patient with patient

Little paraclete.

Writers are Weird

by DBG

I am a restless, dissatisfied reader; I canNOT sit still and be satisfied with the author's story. I have to interrupt to question and converse with his characters to figure out how I feel about what they are really saying. If I don't agree with their logic, I write my own story.

I remember finally putting away the primary-reader books and picking up my first big-girl book in fourth grade: It was about a little girl--she was bigger than me--12 years old--who just moved into a country home; Betsy was her name. "She woke up and stared at the sun-made patterns on her skyblue carpet." (She had a yellow room with blue carpet--just like my friend Roxanne Kirk. Roxanne had curled orange toe nails.) I couldn't understand how Betsy could just lie in bed staring at the dumb carpet; how come she didn't itch to go outside and roll around in the grass?

As I passed from the fourth and

into the fifth grade, my teacher told us to go on a reading adventure by reading a chapter in Daddy's farm magazine or in Mom's Reader's Digest books, and then we'd come to class and report on what we'd read. Wow! I could read Mom's books. Before, "You are not old enough to read Mommy's books, young lady--go outside and play!" Mom had spanked me for looking at the picture on one of her books.

In case Mom didn't believe that my teacher said we HAD TO read daddy- and mommy-books, I waited until she was outside before starting my assignment. Slam! The door banged back and she was out of sight. I raced to the couch and lay down--just like Mom lies--before I turned over her book. It was called The Third Deadly Sin: The lady sat in a bar drinking a Pina----thing. This man came up and asked her if she needed a ride home . . . (So many big

words.) She followed the guy out to his car, and suddenly he dragged her into the alley, threw her down, and ripped off her nylons . . . (Big word, big word, big word) He found a tampon inside her and said, "What the hell is this?" (I didn't know.) He threw it aside. As he did all this stuff, the lady didn't move and didn't scream; she just reached into her pocket, grasped a knife, and slashed him through the neck. (The blood scared me, but I was more fascinated with what the tampon was, and if Mom had one, and if Daddy knew what they were, and if I would be embarrassed if I KNEW THAT HE KNEW.)

My new teacher asked me what I had read. "I read one of my mom's books. It was about a lady that had a tampon-thing. And a guy took it away from her so she killed him. What's a tampon?" Teacher called on Roxanne; Teacher didn't like my question. I quickly raised my hand to tell her something about . . . something about the Betsy-book I'd read before. I could say something about the pretty sun patterns. (I still thought Betsy was dumb, but maybe Teacher would like that answer.) She didn't pick on me, and I felt heat washing my face. After that day, she only occasionally called on

me.

Though Teacher ignored me, I could not help but continue to question what I read. I began more fully to understand what the characters said and did, but I still insisted on making up my own story, by asking questions, and adding my own ideas as I read theirs: reading it was living it. Whether the teacher thought my additions to the story appropriate or not did not make any more difference than a blush. I believed my way of reading was healthy. In retrospect, I agree; it was a child-like exploration, experimentation, and resolution. When I read, I responded to the persona in front of me as closely as I read my person in the bedroom mirror. In adolescence, a period of astounding change took place, and I could not ignore it, it wouldn't go away no matter how hesitant adults were to educate me on the facts of life:

Daily I examined all my parts and got used to the way they looked. As the years went by, I watched hair gradually grow in here and there. I guess I could have seen and covered up and ignored that this was happening to me. But I looked a long time at myself and decided: "This hair is

kind of ugly--not as bad as Roxanne's toe nails--just kind of steel-wooly." I plucked them all out with a tweezers. "Did everybody grow the same?" (I couldn't ask Teacher because she'd tell me not to bother her.)

Eventually, it hurt too much to pluck them all, so I watched them. Then more stuff happened; I started getting rounder in places, and the hair kind of filled in some of those places. I thought I looked great--beginning to look like the lady on the cover of Mom's book, the one I wasn't supposed to read. The only problem with my discovery was that I couldn't tell anyone what I'd found.

Soon it was my first day of junior high gym class, and I dreaded it because all the girls had to take showers together. Maybe they would laugh at me and not know that I thought I looked nice. In my nervousness, I started talking about anything I could think of: the nasty history teacher, oh-so-much homework, and --"Do you guys wear bras yet?" At first their chins fell and arms folded around. "I do." I volunteered, a little too loudly. I blushed and then recovered. "Look--." They did. I yanked up my t-shirt and stuck out the new pink bra

Mom had given me.

I believe I stuck out my half-filled bra because I had to tell somebody that I saw something different. I didn't know whether I was supposed to feel good about this, but I had to go ahead and make my own evaluations about what I was and not be ashamed.

In college I found people like me, coincidentally, most of them write for the newspaper. The newspaper itself acts as the blind mirror I peer through searching for toe nails or tampons, things I find unusual. After I find an oddity in myself or someone else, I keep peering for the chance I might see a picture developing, filling in places that nobody talks about, but what everyone needs to know to feel okay about their own toe nails. In the newspaper community, we all are curious and have collections of toe nails, pubic hair, and other unmentionables. We collect these articles and sort them out to admire or dispute their uglinesses. We wonder if Daddys know about tampons, and in the meantime, we continue to grow up and begin to understand what is so amazing about sun patches on blue carpet.

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The Spectrum was produced solely because Julie and Grace put in the time (with Verna kicking their butts) to make this a HECKUVA magazine.